United Nations

A/54/PV.94

General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

94th plenary meeting
Monday, 3 April 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 49 *(continued)*

United Nations reform: measures and proposals

(b) The Millennium Assembly of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/2000)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: I have the honour to present my millennium report.

The millennium might have been no more than an accident of the calendar, but you — the Governments and the peoples of the world — have chosen to make it more than that: an occasion for all humanity to celebrate and to reflect. The world did celebrate on New Year's Eve, in one time zone after another. And you, the General Assembly, have provided a unique opportunity for us all to reflect on our common destiny by convening what will surely be the largest gathering of political leaders the world has ever seen.

The object of my report is to provide that gathering with a basic document to work from. In it I have attempted to identify the main challenges that we face as we enter the twenty-first century and to sketch out an action plan for addressing them.

If one word encapsulates the changes we are living through, it is "globalization". We live in a world that is interconnected as never before; one in which groups and individuals interact more and more directly across State frontiers, often without involving the State at all. This has its dangers, of course. Crime, narcotics, terrorism, disease, weapons — all these move back and forth faster and in greater numbers than in the past. People feel threatened by events far away.

But the benefits of globalization are obvious, too: faster growth, higher living standards and new opportunities, not only for individuals but also for better understanding between nations, and for common action.

One problem is that, at present, these opportunities are far from being equally distributed. How can we say that half of the human race — which has yet to make or receive a phone call, let alone use a computer — is taking part in globalization? We cannot, without insulting their poverty.

A second problem is that, even where the global market does reach, it is not yet underpinned, as national markets are, by rules based on shared social objectives. In the absence of such rules, globalization makes many people feel that they are at the mercy of unpredictable forces. The overarching challenge of our times,

0037490 (E)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

therefore, is to make globalization mean more than bigger markets. To make a success of this great upheaval, we must learn how to govern better and, above all, how to govern better together.

We need to make our States stronger and more effective at the national level, and we need to get them working together on global issues, all pulling their weight and all having their say.

What are these global issues? I have grouped them under three headings, each of which relates to a fundamental human freedom: freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to sustain their lives on this planet.

First, I shall refer to freedom from want. How can we call human beings free and equal in dignity when over 1 billion of them are struggling to survive on less than $1 a day, without safe drinking water, and when half of all humanity lacks adequate sanitation? Some of us are worrying about whether the stock market will crash, or struggling to master our latest computer, while more than half of our fellow men and women have much more basic worries, such as where their children's next meal is coming from.

Unless we redouble and concert our efforts, poverty and inequality will get worse still, since world population will grow by a further 2 billion in the next quarter-century, with almost all the increase in the poorest countries.

Many of these problems are at their worst in sub-Saharan Africa, where extreme poverty affects a higher proportion of the population than anywhere else and is compounded by a higher incidence of conflict, HIV/AIDS and other ills. I am asking the world community to make special provision for Africa's needs and to give full support to Africans in their struggle to overcome these problems. My report sets a series of targets for reversing these frightening trends throughout the world.

I believe that, within the next 15 years, we can halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty; ensure that all children — girls and boys alike, but particularly girls — receive a full primary education; and halt the spread of HIV/AIDS. Within 20 years, we can also transform the lives of 100 million slum dwellers around the world. I believe we should be able to offer all young people between the ages of 15 and 24 the chance of decent work.

These targets are realistic, if we take full advantage of the opportunities offered by globalization and the revolution in information technology. Much depends on developing countries themselves adopting the right policies, but the industrialized world, too, has a vital part to play. It must fully open its markets to products from developing countries; it must provide faster and deeper debt relief; and it must give more, and better focused, development assistance.

Needless to say, the role of the private sector is also crucial. It is vital that we form new partnerships to make the most of the new technology. I am announcing several new examples in my report. One is a network of 10,000 on-line sites to provide hospitals and clinics in developing countries with the up-to-date health information and resources they need. Another is a consortium of high-tech volunteer groups from industrialized countries to train people in developing countries in the uses and opportunities of information technology. A third is an initiative, led by one of the biggest international telecommunications groups, to provide round-the-clock communications in areas that have been struck by natural disasters, when instant information can save the lives of thousands of people.

The second main heading in the report is freedom from fear. Wars between States are, mercifully, less frequent than they used to be. But in the last decade, internal wars have claimed more than 5 million lives and driven many times that number of people from their homes. Moreover, we still live under the shadow of weapons of mass destruction. I believe that both of these threats require us to think of security less in terms of merely defending territory and more in terms of protecting people. That means that we must tackle the threat of deadly conflict at every stage of the process.

We must do more to prevent conflicts from happening at all. Most conflicts happen in poor countries, especially those which are badly governed or in which power and wealth are very unfairly distributed between ethnic or religious groups. So the best way to prevent conflict is to promote political arrangements in which all groups are fairly represented, combined with human rights, minority rights and broad-based economic development.

Also, illicit transfers of weapons, money or natural resources must be forced into the limelight so that we can control them better. We must protect vulnerable people by finding better ways to enforce humanitarian and

human rights law and to ensure that gross violations do not go unpunished. National sovereignty offers vital protection to small and weak States, but it should not be a shield for crimes against humanity. In extreme cases, the clash of these two principles confronts us with a real dilemma, and the Security Council may have a moral duty to act on behalf of the international community.

In most cases, however, the international community should be able to preserve peace by measures which do not infringe State sovereignty. It can do so if our capacity to conduct peace operations is strengthened. On this point, the Millennium Summit will receive separate recommendations from a high-level panel that I have established to study the issue.

Economic sanctions are one weapon available to the Security Council, of which it made extensive use during the 1990s. But too often, these sanctions fail to impress delinquent rulers, while causing much unnecessary suffering to innocent people. We must target them better.

Finally, we must pursue our disarmament agenda more vigorously. Since 1995, it has lost momentum in an alarming way. That means not only controlling the traffic in small arms much more tightly, but also returning to the vexed issue of nuclear weapons. This month's Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is likely to be a depressing affair unless there are clear signals that all parties, including the nuclear-weapon States, are ready for a real effort. I am suggesting that a broader-based international conference, to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers of all kinds, should now be seriously considered.

The third fundamental freedom my report addresses is the one that is not clearly identified in the Charter, because in 1945 our founders could scarcely imagine that it would ever be threatened. I mean the freedom of future generations to sustain their lives on this planet.

Even now, many of us have not understood how seriously that freedom is threatened. I am told that in all the Assembly's deliberations and in all its preparatory work for the Millennium Assembly over the past 18 months, the environment was never seriously considered. And in preparing this report I found many fewer policy prescriptions ready to be put into practice than I did in the other areas I have mentioned.

Yet the facts set out in that section are deeply troubling. I beseech members to read it with at least as much attention as the rest of the report. If I could sum it up in one sentence, I should say that we are plundering our children's heritage to pay for our present unsustainable practices. This must stop. We must reduce emissions of carbon and other greenhouse gases, to put a stop to global warming. Implementing the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is a vital first step.

The "green revolution", which brought dramatic increases in agricultural productivity in the 1970s and 1980s, has slowed down. We need to follow it with a "blue revolution" focused on increasing productivity per unit of water and on managing our watersheds and flood plains more carefully. We must face the implications of a steadily shrinking surface of cultivable land, at a time when every year brings many millions of new mouths to feed. Biotechnology may offer the best hope, but only if we can resolve the controversies and allay the fears surrounding it. I am convening a global policy network to consider these issues urgently, so that the poor and the hungry do not lose out.

We must preserve our forests and fisheries and the diversity of living species, all of which are close to collapsing under the pressure of human consumption and destruction. In short, we need a new ethic of stewardship. We need a much better informed public, and we need to take environmental costs and benefits fully into account in our economic and other policy decisions. We need regulations and incentives to discourage pollution and over-consumption of non-renewable resources, and to encourage environment-friendly practices. And we need more accurate scientific data.

Above all, we need to remember the old African wisdom which I learned as a child: that the earth is not ours; it is a treasure we hold in trust for our descendants.

But members may be asking by now, What about the United Nations? Is not the theme of the Summit, and of the report, the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century? Yes, it is, and the report contains a further section on renewing the United Nations, which I hope Member States will take very seriously.

But let us not forget why the United Nations matters. It matters only to the extent that it can make a useful contribution to solving the problems and accomplishing the tasks I have just outlined. Those are

the problems and the tasks which affect the everyday lives of our peoples. It is on how we handle them that the utility of the United Nations will be judged. If we lose sight of that point, the United Nations will have little or no role to play in the twenty-first century.

Let us never forget that our Organization was founded in the name of "We, the peoples", the words I have chosen as the title of my report. We are at the service of the world's peoples, and we must listen to them. They are telling us that past achievements are not enough; they are telling us that we must do more — and do it better.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Secretary-General for the introduction of his substantive, eloquent, historic and thought-provoking report entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century".

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.